

Samples of Student Writing

Following are writing samples that have been annotated to illustrate the criteria required to meet the Common Core State Standards for particular types of writing—argument, informative/explanatory text, and narrative—in a given grade. Each of the samples exhibits at least the level of quality required to meet the Writing standards for that grade.

The range of accomplishment within each grade reflects differences in individual development as well as in the conditions under which the student writers were expected to work. Some of the samples were written in class or as homework; others were written for on-demand assessments; still others were the result of sustained research projects. Where possible, each sample includes information about the circumstances under which it was produced. The samples come from students in kindergarten through grade 12. The students attended school in a number of states and districts across the country.

At the lower grades, the samples include “opinion” writing, an elementary type of argument in which students give reasons for their opinions and preferences. Because reasons are required, such writing helps prepare students for drafting the arguments they will be expected to create beginning in grade 6.

Acknowledgment

The Standards work group would like to express its appreciation to teachers and students at Monte Vista High School in California and the Randolph Technical Career Center in Vermont; other colleagues in California, Massachusetts, and Washington state; and ACT, Inc., and the *Concord Review*, who helped find and obtain permission for several of the samples included in the set. The group also would like to express its appreciation to the New Standards Project and to the International Reading Association, which allowed the use of several samples from their publications, and to the other student writers who granted permission to reproduce their work here.

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Permissions

The following student writing samples have been reprinted for the Common Core State Standards Initiative with the express permission of the following organizations and individuals.

ACT, Inc.:

Untitled essay on dress codes

California Department of Education:

“Football”; “Miss Sadie”

The *Concord Review*:

“In the Wake of the Spanish Lady: American Economic Resilience in the Aftermath of the Influenza Epidemic of 1918” by Brooke Granowski, *Concord Review*, 20(1), 203–216 (©2009 Concord Review, Inc.)

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education:

“Dear Mr. Sandler”; “A Pet Story About My Cat . . . Gus”; “Animal Farm”

Monte Vista High School in California:

“The True Meaning of Friendship”; “Lives on Mango, Rides the Whale”; untitled essay on civil disobedience in India; “Marching to His Own Beat”; “Summary of Key Points”

The National Center on Education and the Economy, on behalf of New Standards:

“My fabit Book is do you Want to be my FRIEND”; “Fraggs (Frogs)”; “I Went to Disnand”; “My Big Book About Spain”; “I bot a little cotton ball”; “Owl Moon”; “My first tooth is gone”; “Horses”; “When my Puppys Ranaway”; “Zoo Field Trip”; “Author Response: Roald Dahl”; “Getting Shot and Living Through It”; “A Geographical Report”; “The Old Man and the Sea”; “_____ School Bond Levy”

Randolph Technical Career Center in Vermont:

“Wood Joints”; “TIG/GTAW Welding”

Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction:

“Glowing Shoes”; “Video Cameras in Classrooms”

Permission to reprint each of the following samples was granted by its author:

“Freedom From Structure”; “Fact vs. Fiction and All the Grey Space in Between”; “The Making of a Human Voice and How to Use It”

Student Sample: Grade 9, Argument

This argument was written in response to a classroom assignment. The students were asked to compare a book they read on their own to a movie about the same story and to prove which was better. Students had six weeks to read and one and a half weeks to write, both in and out of class.

The True Meaning of Friendship

John Boyne's story, The Boy in the Striped Pajamas, tells the tale of an incredible friendship between two eight-year old boys during the Holocaust. One of the boys is Bruno, the son of an important German commander who is put in charge of Auschwitz Camp, and the other is Shmuel, a Jewish boy inside the camp. Throughout the story their forbidden friendship grows, and the two boys unknowingly break the incredible racial boundaries of the time. They remain best friends until Bruno goes under the fence to help Shmuel find his father when they are both killed in the gas showers of the camp. By comparing and contrasting supporting characters, irony, and the themes in the movie and the book, it is clear that the movie, The Boy in the Striped Pajamas (Mark Herman, 2008) is not nearly as good as the novel of the same title.

Characterization is very important to a story and influences how a person interprets the novel or movie, and one important way that the book differs from the movie is how Bruno's mother is characterized. In the movie, she is unrealistically portrayed as an honest woman with good moral values, and is almost as naive as Bruno is about what is going on at Auschwitz. When she discovers what her husband is doing to people at the camp she is deeply disturbed. Mortified by her husband's cruelty, their relationship declines. In contrast, she is a far more sinister character in the book. Though Bruno is too young to understand what his mother is doing, one of the reasons he dislikes Lieutenant Kotler is that, "... he was always in the living room with Mother and making jokes with her, and Mother laughed at his jokes more than she laughed at Father's" (162). Bruno's mother is very unhappy in her new situation away from Berlin, and her discontent leads her to cheat on her husband. This also leads her to unknowingly hurt her son, for Bruno is upset that she is paying more attention to Lieutenant Kotler than she is to his father, and the damage she causes could be magnified if she continues to disrupt their family. Further examples of her abysmal character and unfaithfulness are revealed when Bruno's mother finds the young lieutenant and says, "Oh Kurt, precious, you're still here . . . I have a little free time now if—Oh! she said, noticing Bruno standing there. 'Bruno! What are you doing here?'"(166). Her disloyalty further allows the reader to see that her character is far from virtuous, contrary to the opinion of a person who viewed the movie. Throughout the story, it also becomes apparent that Bruno's mother is also an alcoholic, and, "Bruno worried for her health because he'd never known anyone to need quite so many medicinal sherries" (188). Unable to come to terms with her new circumstances and strained relationship with her husband, Bruno's mother tries to drink away her problems, further conveying that she is a weak character. Bruno's extreme innocence about his mother and situation at Auschwitz are magnified by the use of irony in both the movie and the book.

In some ways the book and the movie have similar aspects, and one of these aspects is how irony is used to emphasize Bruno's innocence and to greatly emphasize the tragic mood of the story. In the final climactic scene of the movie—just after Bruno has gone under the fence to help Shmuel find his father—the two boys are led to the gas showers to be killed. Unaware of what is about to happen to them, Bruno tells Shmuel that his father must have ordered this so it must be for a good reason, and that they are going into the air-tight rooms to stay out of the rain and avoid getting sick. This statement is incredibly ironic because, unbeknownst to Bruno, his father has unknowingly commenced his own son's death sentence. In addition to this, the soldiers have no intention of keeping their prisoners healthy. It never occurs to Bruno that anyone would want to destroy another human being or treat them badly, and his innocence makes his premature death all the more tragic. Although the movie may be incredibly ironic in a few specific instances, the book contains a plethora of ironic events that also accentuate Bruno's childishness and naivety. A profound example of this is exhibited when Bruno thinks to himself that, "... he did like stripes and he felt increasingly fed up that he had to wear trousers and shirts and ties and shoes that were too tight for him when Shmuel and his friends got to wear striped pajamas all day long" (155). Bruno has no clue that the people in the "striped pajamas" are being cruelly treated and murdered, and is jealous of what he thinks is freedom. Bruno once again reveals his innocence when he asks Pavel, the Jewish man from the camp who cleans him up after a fall, "If you're a doctor, then why are you waiting on tables? Why aren't you working at a hospital somewhere?" (83). It is a mystery to Bruno that a doctor would be reduced to such a state for no transparent reason, and his beliefs should be what all adults think. Though

what he says is naive, it points out the barbarity of the German attitude toward the Jews. If an uneducated child could be puzzled by this, then how could learned adults allow such a thing? Through Bruno's comment, John Boyne conveys the corruptness of the German leaders during the Holocaust, an idea that the movie does not relay to the watcher nearly as well. The book impels the reader to think deeper about the horrors of the Holocaust, and all this ties into the true theme of the story.

The *Boy in the Striped Pajamas* and its movie counterpart both have different themes, but it is the book's theme that accurately states the author's message. The movie ends with a race against time as Bruno's family searches for him in the camp, trying to find him before he is killed. They are too late, and Bruno and Shmuel die together like so many other anonymous children during the Holocaust. The theme of the movie is how so many children died at the ruthless hands of their captors; but the book's theme has a deeper meaning. As Bruno and Shmuel die together in the chamber, "... the room went very dark, and in the chaos that followed, Bruno found that he was still holding Shmuel's hand in his own and nothing in the world would have persuaded him to let it go" (242). Bruno loves Shmuel, and he is willing to stay with him no matter what the consequences, even if it means dying with him in the camp that his father controls. They have conquered all boundaries, and this makes the two boys more than just two more individuals who died in Auschwitz. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is not the story of two children who died in a concentration camp; this story is about an incredible friendship that triumphed over racism and lasted until the very end. It is the story of what should have been between Jews and Germans, a friendship between two groups of people in one nation who used their strengths to help each other.

Based on the analysis of supporting characters, irony, and themes of John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* and the movie, it can be concluded that the book is far superior to the movie. Though Bruno's mother is a dishonest woman in the book, her bad character is more realistic for the time when compared to the mother in the movie who is horrified by Auschwitz. John Boyne uses many examples of irony in the book to emphasize Bruno's innocence and to magnify the tragedy of his death. Unlike the movie the irony in the book leads the reader to ponder on the barbarity of the German leaders during the Holocaust. The book's theme of long lasting friendship gives purpose to the story, while the movie's theme of the cruelty of concentration camps does not lead the viewer to delve deeper into the story. It is necessary for the person to read this book in order to understand the true message of friendship and cooperation in the story, a message that a person who had only seen the movie could not even begin to grasp.

Annotation

The writer of this piece

- **introduces a precise claim and distinguishes the claim from (implied) alternate or opposing claims.**
 - ... it is clear that the movie, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (Mark Herman, 2008) is not nearly as good as the novel of the same title.
- **develops the claim and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's need for information about the book.**
 - Reason: *In the movie, she [the mother] is unrealistically portrayed as an honest woman with good moral values ... she is a far more sinister character in the book ...*
 - Evidence: ... one of the reasons he [Bruno] dislikes Lieutenant Kotler is that, "... he was always in the living room with Mother and making jokes with her, and Mother laughed at his jokes more than she laughed at Father's" (162) ... Bruno's mother finds the young lieutenant and says, "Oh Kurt, precious, you're still here ... I have a little free time now if—Oh! she said, noticing Bruno standing there. 'Bruno! What are you doing here?'" (166). ... Bruno's mother is also an alcoholic, and, "Bruno worried for her health because he'd never known anyone to need quite so many medicinal sherries" (188)
 - Reason: ... it is the book's theme that accurately states the author's message ... the book's theme has a deeper meaning ... The book's theme of long lasting friendship gives purpose to the story ...
 - Evidence: *The movie ends with a race against time as Bruno's family searches for him in*

the camp, trying to find him before he is killed. They are too late, as Bruno and Shmuel die together like so many other anonymous children during the Holocaust . . . [In the book] As Bruno and Shmuel are standing together in the chamber, “ . . . the room went very dark, and in the chaos that followed, Bruno found that he was still holding Shmuel’s hand in his own and nothing in the world would have persuaded him to let it go” (242).

- **uses words, phrases and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claims and (implied) counterclaims.**
 - *In the movie . . . In contrast . . . Though Bruno is too young . . . Further examples of her abysmal character . . . Throughout the story, it also becomes apparent . . . In the final climactic scene . . . because, unbeknownst to Bruno . . . A profound example of this . . . Based on the analysis . . .*
- **establishes and maintains a formal style and objective tone.**
 - *John Boyne’s story, The Boy in the Striped Pajamas, tells the tale of an incredible friendship between two eight-year old boys during the Holocaust. . . . Characterization is very important to a story and influences how a person interprets the novel or movie, and one important way that the book differs from the movie is how Bruno’s mother is characterized . . . In some ways the book and the movie have similar aspects, and one of these aspects is how irony is used to emphasize Bruno’s innocence and to greatly emphasize the tragic mood of the story . . .*
- **provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the argument presented.**
 - *Based on the analysis of supporting characters, irony, and themes of John Boyne’s The Boy in the Striped Pajamas and the movie, it can be concluded that the book is far superior to the movie. Though Bruno’s mother is a dishonest woman in the book, her bad character is more realistic for the time when compared to the mother in the movie who is horrified by Auschwitz. John Boyne uses many examples of irony in the book to emphasize Bruno’s innocence and to magnify the tragedy of his death. Unlike the movie the irony in the book leads the reader to ponder on the barbarity of the German leaders during the Holocaust. The book’s theme of long lasting friendship gives purpose to the story, while the movie’s theme of the cruelty of concentration camps does not lead the viewer to delve deeper into the story. It is necessary for the person to read this book in order to understand the true message of friendship and cooperation in the story, a message that a person who had only seen the movie could not even begin to grasp.*
- **demonstrates exemplary command of the conventions of standard written English.**

Student Sample: Grade 9, Informative/Explanatory

This essay was written in response to the following assignment: *Consider The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1984) and the movie *Whale Rider*, based on the novel by Maori author Witi Ihimaera and directed by Niki Caro (2003). Write a comparison/contrast paper discussing the similarities and differences between these two works. Keeping in mind the main characters Esperanza Cordero and Paikea Apirana, the traditions of the two cultures, Hispanic and Maori, the role of women, religion, and symbolism, compare and contrast how Esperanza and Pai bridge the past and the present for their people.

Lives on Mango, Rides the Whale

More than 8,000 miles of land and sea separate two seemingly contrasting young women. One young girl lives in the urban streets of Chicago, depicted in *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1984), while the other thrives in the countryside of New Zealand, as shown in *Whale Rider*, directed by Niki Caro (2003)—one an immigrant from a foreign country and the other a native Maori descendent. Both girls struggle for change, fighting their own quiet wars. Despite the vast differences in lifestyle and culture, both Esperanza Cordero of Chicago and Paikea Apirana of New Zealand are destined to be leaders of their generation in spite of the multitude of traditions and expectations that define them as individuals and their role as women in society. These two natural-born leaders are bridging the gap between the ancient customs and modern-day life.

While culture has a huge impact on the Cordero and Apirana families, the protagonists of both groups are affected the most. In Esperanza's world, women are put down and locked inside their husband's houses, having no rights and absolutely no say in their own households. The patriarchal society overwhelms every aspect of life, and Esperanza demands change through rebelling in her own quiet war. "I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain" (*The House on Mango Street*). She plans to set her own example, to forge her own path, in the hopes that the oppressed women of Mango Street will realize alternative options. Desperately seeking an opportunity to flee Mango Street, Esperanza dreams of the day when she will leave just another crippled house to seek her own way in the world. However, she states, "They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot get out" (*The House on Mango Street*). Paikea, on the other hand is a native of New Zealand. According to legend, her ancestor and namesake rode on the back of a whale to this land and her family has been there ever since. Because of her rich and influential history, Pai is very proud of her culture. She wants the best for her people and she understands that the village and tribe must modernize and change with the times or else they may lose everything. For example, in the movie *Whale Rider*, Pai walks into her kitchen to find three elder women smoking cigarettes. Hiding the evidence, the conversation dies as soon as she enters the room, but she says to them, "Maori women have got to stop smoking." Pai loves her culture and the significance of the whale, yet she, like Esperanza, demands change, starting with her grandfather Koro accepting the fact that Pai is destined to become the first female chief of the village. Both girls dream of the day where their women will be respected and treated as equals in their patriarchal societies.

Family also plays an important role in both *The House on Mango Street* and *Whale Rider*. The Corderos are one happy group, with lots of strong and inspirational individuals, binding relatives together like a ribbon on a present. Esperanza, the namesake and great-grandmother of the young protagonist, was a strong-willed woman. "My great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry" (*The House on Mango Street*). Another prominent man is Esperanza's Uncle Nacho. At a baptism, Uncle Nacho convinces Esperanza to dance; despite her sad brown shoes, she in fact does with her uncle telling her how beautiful she is, making her forget her discomfort and hatred of her shoes. Even though Esperanza may be loved in her family and close community, she is of low social status in general. She, like Geraldo in the vignette "Geraldo No Last Name," is "just another brazer who didn't speak English. Just another wetback. You know the kind. The ones who always look ashamed." Her father is a gardener at rich people's houses, and her mother watches over the four children (Esperanza, Nenny, Carlos, and Kiki). From a typical Mexican family, Esperanza is not poor but also has never really experienced any luxury other than a used car.

On the other hand, Paikea comes from a broken family. Her mother died during childbirth, along with her twin brother. After feeling the depression of loss and loneliness, Pai's father Porourangi left New Zealand to live in Germany, where he sculpted and sold Maori art. Pai was left to be raised by her grandparents Koro, the current chief, and Nanny Flowers. Similar to Esperanza, Pai shares common family members that inspired them and encouraged them through their trials, Nanny Flowers, for example, raised Pai to be the woman she is—independent and tough. Regardless of the criticism from Koro, Nanny Flowers encourages Pai to do what she knows is best, even if that results in harsh consequences. For

example, during the movie, Pai and the young boys of the village attend a school lesson taught by Koro. Pai is last in line, but sits down on the front bench with the others, although Koro tells her to sit in the back, the proper place for a woman. She refuses to move even when her grandfather threatens to send her away, which he does because Pai will not give up her seat. As she walks away from the group, Nanny Flowers has a proud little smile on her lips, for she knows that Pai is ordained to be the next leader. Because Pai is next in line to become the chief, she is of very high status, just below the current chief.

A prominent figure on Mango Street, Esperanza presents an alternative to the oppression of women in the community. In the outside world, however, she is just another young girl with parents who immigrated to the United States in the hopes of a better life for their children. Esperanza wants to set an example for the women trapped in their houses, to provide an escape for those ensnared in the barbed wire of marriage. Above all, she dreams of the day where she can leave Mango Street, yet she knows that it is her duty to return to free her friends. As told by the Three Sisters, “You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can’t erase what you know. You can’t forget who you are.” These three women told Esperanza that she was special and was meant to be a strong and leading person, just like Pai and the whales. Because of the rich diversity and influences in her neighborhood, Esperanza learns through her friends and experiences they share. Marin, Rafaela, Lucy, Rachel, Sally, and Alicia all provided a learning experience in one way or another. As all of these young ladies are in a similar age range with Esperanza, they undergo multiple trials side-by-side.

Contrastingly, Paikea has the blood of a leader running through her veins. She is a native, a leader, and a change. Pai, like Esperanza, is a leading figure amongst the women of her community. Always aware of the outer world, Pai knows that her people must adapt to the changing times or they will be swept away by the current of technology. She holds a great love and respect for her culture and people, and she wants what is best for them, even if it involves changing ancient traditions and ways. Pai knows it is her duty to stay, and her desire keeps her rooted in her little village. Once, Pai’s father offered to take her to Germany with him to start a new life, and she agreed to go with him. However, in the car ride along the beach, a whale calls from the depths of the ocean and it is then that Pai knows she cannot leave her people. She asks her father to turn around and she returns to the village of her people. Due to having little to no interaction with kids her age, Pai must learn from her elders and through Koro’s reactions. The children of the village tease and taunt Pai for her name and her big dreams, yet she pays them no attention. Unlike Esperanza, Pai knew from the beginning that she was destined to be great and is different from others her age.

Finally, the personalities of these two protagonists are exceedingly different. Esperanza, although older than Paikea, has low self-esteem and little self-confidence. She is afraid of adults, and as shown in “A Rice Sandwich,” she often cries when confronted by her elders. Throughout the novel, Esperanza is shamed by her actions, other’s actions, and other’s words. All this young girl wants is to make friends and be loved by others, but she gets in her own way. However, when the world seems against her and she is all alone, Esperanza writes to escape. As directed by her deceased Aunt Lupe, she continues the poetry and short stories that free her from the chokehold of Mango Street. While she finds joy in pencils and paper, she does not in her name. “Esperanza” in Spanish means “hope” and “waiting,” two words that describe this girl perfectly. She is the hope for the oppressed but she must wait for her opportunity to leave. In contrast to Pai, she actually did have a childhood, a carefree times of playing and having fun with friends before the burden of responsibility is placed on their shoulders, like the sky on Atlas’s.

Paikea, alternatively, is a proud and confident girl. She knows what is best and what her people must do in order to survive. Starting with the women, she tells them to change their ways at the ripe old age of ten. Pai is a serious and mature child, with a grown mannerism and demeanor. Little can shame her, except for her grandfather; all Pai wants is to be loved and accepted by Koro. While everyone in the village can see that Pai is fated to become the next chief, Koro stubbornly refuses to believe until the very end. In her position, she takes her ancestry very seriously. Pai was named after her ancestor who rode the back of a whale to New Zealand, and she is exceedingly proud of her name, unlike Esperanza. And unlike Esperanza, it seems as though Pai has no time for boys or any relationships between them. She considers herself “one of the boys,” and shows no interest. Growing up with her situation and the multiple responsibilities that followed left little time for an actual childhood.

In the end, the fate of two different cultures rests in the hands of two different young girls. While they both strive for freedom from oppression and change, Esperanza Cordero and Paikea Apirana have different techniques through which they reach those goals. Esperanza, a quiet and ashamed girl of 13 or 14, chooses a singular path to walk. She chooses the road she must walk alone, unaccompanied but free from patriarchal domination. While fighting to free those sitting at the window, Esperanza finds her own destiny as the change needed on Mango Street. Paikea, a strong and confident girl of 10 or 11, walks the forbidden path, the path of a chief. She chooses to defy her grandfather and all traditions in order to modernize her people. In order to save them, she must change them. Both young women, influential and inspiring, search for the key to free the ones they love.

Annotation

The writer of this piece

- **introduces the topic.**
 - *More than 8,000 miles of land and sea separate two seemingly contrasting young women. One young girl lives in the urban streets of Chicago, depicted in *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1984), while the other thrives in the countryside of New Zealand, as shown in *Whale Rider*, directed by Niki Caro (2003)—one an immigrant from a foreign country and the other a native Maori descendent. Both girls struggle for change, fighting their own quiet wars. Despite the vast differences in lifestyle and culture, both Esperanza Cordero of Chicago and Paikea Apirana of New Zealand are destined to be leaders of their generation in spite of the multitude of traditions and expectations that define them as individuals and their role as women in society. These two natural-born leaders are bridging the gap between the ancient customs and modern-day life.*
- **organizes complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions.**
 - The writer uses a compare/contrast organizing strategy to explain similarities and differences between the two girls' cultures, families, and personalities and in how they go about bridging *the gap between the ancient customs and modern-day life*.
- **develops the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.**
 - Details: *One young girl lives in the urban streets of Chicago, depicted in *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1984), while the other thrives in the countryside of New Zealand, as shown in *Whale Rider*, directed by Niki Caro (2003)—one an immigrant from a foreign country and the other a native Maori descendent.*
 - Examples: . . . *Nanny Flowers encourages Pai to do what she knows is best, even if that results in harsh consequences. For example, during the movie, Pai and the young boys of the village attend a school lesson taught by Koro. Pai is last in line, but sits down on the front bench with the others, although Koro tells her to sit in the back, the proper place for a woman. She refuses to move even when her grandfather threatens to send her away, which he does because Pai will not give up her seat. As she walks away from the group, Nanny Flowers has a proud little smile on her lips . . .*
 - Quotations: . . . *and Esperanza demands change through rebelling in her own quiet war. "I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain" (*The House on Mango Street*).*
- **uses appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.**
 - *Despite the vast differences in lifestyle and culture, both . . . While culture has a huge impact on the Cordero and Arirana families, the protagonists . . . However, she states . . . According to legend . . . For example . . . yet she, like Esperanza . . . Even though . . . On the other hand . . . Similar to Esperanza . . . Regardless of the criticism from Joro . . . In the outside world, however . . . Above all, she dreams of the day . . . yet she knows . . . Contrastingly . . . Once . . . However . . . Due to having little interaction with kids her age . . . Unlike Esperanza, Pai . . . Finally . . . In contrast to Pai . . . In the end . . . While they both strive for freedom from oppression and change . . .*
- **uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.**
 - *More than 8,000 miles of land and sea separate two seemingly contrasting young women. One young girl lives in the urban streets of Chicago, depicted in *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1984), while the other thrives in the countryside of New Zealand, as shown in *Whale Rider*, directed by Niki Caro (2003)—one an immigrant*

from a foreign country and the other a native Maori descendent. . . . the personalities of these two protagonists are exceedingly different. . . . In the end, the fate of two different cultures rests in the hands of two different young girls.

- **establishes and maintains a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which the student is writing.**
 - *More than 8,000 miles of land and sea separate two seemingly contrasting young women.*
 - *Both young women, influential and inspiring, search for the key to free the ones they love.*
- **provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.**
 - *In the end, the fate of two different cultures rests in the hands of two different young girls. While they both strive for freedom from oppression and change, Esperanza Cordero and Paikea Apirana have different techniques through which they reach those goals. Esperanza, a quiet and ashamed girl of 13 or 14, chooses a singular path to walk. She chooses the road she must walk alone, unaccompanied but free from patriarchal domination. While fighting to free those sitting at the window, Esperanza finds her own destiny as the change needed on Mango Street. Paikea, a strong and confident girl of 10 or 11, walks the forbidden path, the path of a chief. She chooses to defy her grandfather and all traditions in order to modernize her people. In order to save them, she must change them. Both young women, influential and inspiring, search for the key to free the ones they love.*
- **demonstrates exemplary command of the conventions of standard written English.**

Student Sample: Grade 9, Informative/Explanatory

This short constructed response was prompted by the following test question: “Explain how civil disobedience was used in the struggle for India’s independence.” The student had only a portion of a class period to write the response.

Civil disobedience is the refusal to follow an unjust law. Gandhi led India to independence by using civil disobedience and non-violent resistance. His motto was, “will not fight, will not comply.” One of Gandhi’s first acts of civil disobedience was when he refused to move to 3rd class on the train. He bought a 1st class ticket but they wouldn’t let him sit there. He then got kicked off the train. This is just one example of Gandhi’s enforcement of non-violent resistance. He has done many things from refusing to get off the sidewalk to being beaten for burning his pass. He figured that if he died, it would be for the right reasons. He said, “They can have my body, not my obedience.” Eventually he got all of India going against Britain’s unjust laws. While it took the people of India longer to realize, Gandhi proved that civil disobedience and non-violent resistance can be a more effective way of fighting back. Britain finally let India have its independence.

Annotation

The writer of this piece

- **introduces the topic.**
 - *Civil disobedience is the refusal to follow an unjust law.*
- **organizes complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions.**
 - The writer presents examples to illustrate civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance.
- **develops the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.**
 - Details: . . . 3rd class on the train . . . 1st class ticket . . .
 - Quotations: *His motto was, “will not fight, will not comply” . . . He said, “They can have my body, not my obedience.”*
 - Examples: *One of Gandhi’s first acts of civil disobedience was when he refused to move to 3rd class on the train . . . He has done many things from refusing to get off the sidewalk to being beaten for burning his pass.*
- **uses appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.**
 - . . . *This is just one example . . . Eventually . . . While it took the people of India longer to realize, Gandhi . . .*
- **uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.**
 - *Civil disobedience is the refusal to follow an unjust law. . . . While it took the people longer to realize, Gandhi proved that civil disobedience and non-violent resistance can be a more effective way of fighting back.*
- **establishes and maintains a formal style and objective tone (although there are some lapses into overly colloquial language, such as *kicked off* and *figured*).**
 - *Civil disobedience is the refusal to follow an unjust law.*
- **provides a concluding statement that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.**
 - *Eventually he got all of India going against Britain’s unjust laws. . . . Britain finally let India have its independence.*
- **demonstrates good command of the conventions of standard written English (with occasional errors that do not interfere materially with the underlying message).**

Student Sample: Grade 10, Argument

This argument was produced by a student who was asked to write a persuasive essay that required research. The student generated the topic and had an opportunity to revise.

School Bond Levy

The School Board has recently proposed a bond levy to add new facilities as well as conduct some major repairs to the school. The bond includes building a new gymnasium, a new science room and lab, a new Media Center/Library, new Chapter 1 and Special Education classrooms, and other facilities such as more parking space, an increase in storage area, and new locker rooms. Along with new construction, the board is proposing to remodel facilities such as the drama/music areas, the entire roof, the heating system, the school kitchen, and present gym as well. This bond allowing School to add more facilities should be passed in order for young students to be provided with a better education.

Several arguments have been brought up concerning the levy since it failed in the March election. Some say that the school doesn't need to have brand new facilities and better classrooms, but it does. Just this year the school had to shut down for days at a time as a result of a malfunction of the heating system. The roof of the library also had a leaking problem all winter long. The leaking has actually caused the ceiling tiles to rot to the point where they are having to be removed. It isn't safe to sit underneath them because, in fact, they have fallen to tables where students had been working only minutes before.

Another issue that people may be concerned with is the money that taxpayers have to put up for the building. The cost of the project in its entirety will be 2.9 million dollars, meaning that for the next 25 years, taxpayers would pay 40 cents more per thousand dollars in property tax than they do this year. The project does cost a significant amount of money, but the school needs it. If something isn't done now, then the facilities such as the library, the science room and others will continue to grow steadily worse. The construction and remodeling needs to be done eventually, so why not now, when interest rates are low and expenses are also low. Superintendent commented that it would cost the taxpayers much less money now than ten years from now. Another reason that this is a good time to pass this bond is that the results of Ballot Measure 5 are going into effect at the same time as the levy. As it stands now, property tax rates will go down another \$2.50 by next year; however, if taxpayers don't mind paying what they do now and can handle a 40 cent increase, then the school can be that much better.

Many other good reasons we exist for funding this construction now. For one, better facilities will be made available to everyone: staff members, students, and community members. The new gym will allow student athletes to have earlier practices and more time for homework. With only one gym in a K-12 school system, the junior high has to practice in the morning before school, starting at 6:30 A.M., meaning that both the girls and boys teams had to practice at the same time, with half of the court for the girls half for the boys. After school, the high school girls would practice from 3:30 to 5:30 P.M. The varsity boys would then start at 5:30 or 6:00 and go until 7:30. After that, the junior varsity boys would come in for an hour and a half. It's absurd to think that student athletes can make good use of their time with a schedule like that. If the bond were to pass, both the new gym and the present gym would be used for practices and athletes wouldn't have to wait so long to practice every day.

Another reason that the gym should be built is that it is no longer adequate. The bleachers are too close to the court and so there is no room to walk by without getting in the way during a game. The gym also poses a problem for the cheerleaders. As it is now, there is no room for them to cheer. They have to stand on one of the ends which, of course, is right in the way of people walking by. If a new gym were built, enough room would be provided surrounding the court that there wouldn't be any of the problems there are now.

Another advantage to the bond proposed is that it would provide more space in the school. The school has always been small, which is in some ways nice, but it needs to expand. The lack of space is a problem because everyone is crammed into one little hallway trying to make it around from class to class. As it is, there isn't enough room for the library to just be a library or the kitchen to just be a kitchen. Students can't even go to the library when they need to because Health, Media, and other classes are held there. The Satellite Learning classroom, which shares a space with the kitchen, usually has a difficult learning atmosphere each day people prepare food for the hot lunch program. Another

problem area is the current science room and lab. Lab facilities are outdated and cannot be replaced for a variety of reasons related to the plumbing and electrical systems. Both science teachers have said publicly that the chemical storage room is inadequate and unsafe. The science curriculum is a core part of students' education and they deserve good facilities.

It is clear then, that _____ School needs significant improvements in which case the bond must be passed. As a community, education is an essential part of the future. In the past, _____ has relied in the timber industry for employment, but times are changing and the younger generations need to be better prepared to meet the challenges that arise. For example, they need to be able to take part in a variety of activities and be able to achieve in many different areas. If the school is inadequate, how can the younger generations be provided with the education and training they need to be successful in the future?

Annotation

The writer of this piece

- **introduces a precise claim, distinguishes it from alternate or opposing claims, and creates an organization that establishes clear relationships among the claim, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.**
 - *This bond allowing _____ School to add more facilities should be passed in order for young students to be provided with a better education.*
 - *Some say that the school doesn't need to have brand new facilities and better classrooms, but it does.*
 - *Another issue that people may be concerned with is the money that taxpayers have to put up for the building.*
- **develops the claim and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.**
 - *Just this year the school had to shut down for days.*
 - Details about the malfunction of the heating system and the falling ceiling tiles in the library support the claim that *brand new facilities and better classrooms* are needed.
 - *Another issue that people may be concerned with is the money that taxpayers have to put up for the building. The cost of the project in its entirety will be 2.9 million dollars, meaning that for the next 25 years, taxpayers would pay 40 cents more per thousand dollars in property tax than they do this year.*
 - *Superintendent _____ commented that it would cost the taxpayers much less money now than ten years from now.*
 - *... [The gym] is no longer adequate.*
 - *The school has always been small ... [and] it needs to expand.*
 - Details about the scheduling of classes in the library support the claim that the school *needs to expand*.
- **uses words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim and counterclaims.**
 - *The project does cost a significant amount of money, but the school needs it.*
 - *Another issue that people may be concerned with ... Many other good reasons ... Another reason ...*
- **establishes and maintains a formal style and objective tone.**
 - *Another advantage to the bond proposed is that it would provide more space in the school.*
 - *It is clear then, that ...*

- **provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the argument presented.**
 - *If the school is inadequate, how can the younger generations be provided with the education and training they need to be successful in the future?*
- **demonstrates exemplary command of the conventions of standard written English.**

Student Sample: Grade 10, Informative/Explanatory

This essay was produced for an on-demand assessment. Students were told to write about a character in a work of literature whose pride or selfishness creates problems. The abbreviated time frame of the assessment situation (and the consequent lack of opportunity to revise) explains the absence of information and quotations from researched sources and perhaps the occasional spelling errors as well.

Animal Farm

In the novel, Animal Farm, by George Orwell, there is one very particular character whose pride and selfishness creates problems. This character had just merely good ideas in the beginning. However, as time went on, his true self-interest began to shine through. This character started a free republic of animals and turned it into a plantation that used animals as slaves. He never did have enough and always wanted more, regardless of the price that others had to pay. This character whose pride and selfishness creates problems, is none other than the great leader of Animal Farm himself, comrade Napoleon [Napoleon], the pig.

Comrade Napoleon is a powerful authority on Animal Farm. In fact he is the leader of Animal Farm and a high strung leader at that. After Old Major died, Napoleon lived upon Old Major's ideas. Napoleon lead all the animals to rebellion so that Manor Farm ceased to exist, and Animal Farm was born. In the first year, he even worked the fields and helped bring in their biggest harvest ever. Little did the animals know, but he would soon change. Eventually the animals started receiving less food because Napoleon needed more food to power his "large" brain. Later, he goes and runs off his successor, Snowball, so he can have the whole farm to himself. Then he stopped working the fields. He started taking young animals and selling them or using them for his own use. He stopped sleeping in the hay and slept in the farm house instead. Finally, he took away half the grain fields so he could plant barely to make himself beer. This Napoleon was a power hungry, selfish individual for sure.

Being power hungry, always causes problems, and boy did Napoleon cause problems. The animals had received so little food that many were starving, you could see their bones, and some even died of starvation. Nopoleans's lack of work meant the animals had to work harder, and it wasn't easy on an empty stomach. Many animals would break their legs or hoofs but would continue to work. The lack of new workers due to Napoleon's selling them off, meant that nobody could retire, and one old animal even died in the fields. Snowball was a great teacher for the animals, and now that he was gone, they lacked education. Then with finally only half of the fields being productive for food, the animals starved even more and worked harder to make beer that they never saw. Not to mention that they had to sleep on a dirt floor while the lazy Napoleon slept in his nice comfortable bed. His selfishness had deffinitely created problems.

Napoleon's experience had changed the farm drastically. He thought things were getting better while the animals knew they were only getting worse. After the rebellion, many humans disliked Animal Farm and the animals disliked humans. Nopoleans's selfish ways were much like those of a farmer. So eventually as Napoleon became more "human," the town's people began to like him. Napoleon could care less about his animals, just so long as he was on good terms with the humans. By the novel's end, Napoleon is great friends with every human in town. However, his animal slaves are no longer happy as they once were. They still hate humans which means now, they hate Napoleon. So due to Napoleon's pride, the story has changed its ways from start to finish. He has turned friends into foe and foe into friends, but at great cost.

In the novel, Animal Farm, by George Orwell, Comrade Napoleon is a character whose pride and selfishness creates problems. The starving animals have suffered greatly because of their leader's pride. On the other hand, Napoleon has gained great success through his selfishness. Unfortunately, that's just the way it is. You can't have pride without problems. Even if they are little problems, it's still due to pride. Now, if Napoleon had pride in his farm rather than in himself, well then maybe the humans would've hated him, but he'd still has his true friends of four legs. However, he chose to follow a different path and he burned those bridges along the way. So for now, Comrade Napoleon's pride and selfishness has created problems for the animals, but someday, it will create problems for himself.

Annotation

The writer of this piece

- **introduces the topic.**
 - *In the novel, Animal Farm, by George Orwell, there is one very particular character whose pride and selfishness creates problems. . . . This character whose pride and selfishness creates problems, is none other than the great leader of Animal Farm himself, comrade Napoleon [Napoleon], the pig.*
- **organizes complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions.**
 - The organization of the explanation is mostly chronological. The writer focuses on how Napoleon changes over time, how he becomes *power hungry*, and *selfish*, and eventually “*human*.” The writer describes the problems that Napoleon’s changing nature creates.
- **develops the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.**
 - Details: *In the first year, he [Napoleon] even worked the fields and helped bring in their [the animals’] biggest harvest ever. . . . Not to mention that they had to sleep on a dirt floor while the lazy Napoleon slept in his nice comfortable bed.*
 - Examples: *. . . nobody could retire, and one old animal even died in the fields.*
- **uses appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.**
 - *In the novel, Animal Farm, by George Orwell, there is one very particular character whose pride and selfishness creates problems. This character had just merely good ideas in the beginning.*
 - *In the novel . . . In fact . . . In the first year . . . Eventually . . . Being power hungry . . . Not to mention . . . On the other hand . . .*
- **uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.**
 - *In the novel, Animal Farm, by George Orwell, there is one very particular character whose pride and selfishness creates problems. . . . This character started a free republic of animals and turned it into a plantation that used animals as slaves.*
- **establishes and maintains a formal style and objective tone (with the exception of . . . and boy did Napoleon cause problems).**
 - *In the novel, Animal Farm, by George Orwell, there is one very particular character whose pride and selfishness creates problems. . . . Comrade Napoleon’s pride and selfishness has created problems for the animals, but someday, it will create problems for himself.*
- **provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.**
 - *In the novel, Animal Farm, by George Orwell, Comrade Napoleon is a character whose pride and selfishness creates problems. The starving animals have suffered greatly because of their leader’s pride. On the other hand, Napoleon has gained great success through his selfishness. Unfortunately, that’s just the way it is. You can’t have pride without problems. Even if they are little problems, it’s still due to pride. Now, if Napoleon had pride in his farm rather than in himself, well then maybe the humans would’ve hated him, but he’d still has his true friends of four legs. However, he chose to follow a different path and he burned those bridges along the way. So for now, Comrade Napoleon’s pride and selfishness has created problems for the animals, but someday, it will create problems for himself*
- **demonstrates command of some aspects of the conventions of standard written English (yet displays several errors in spelling and other mechanics).**